Springfield Presbyterian Church

First Week of Advent 2020

The 271st Day of March

**Keep Awake in Hope**

As we begin our Advent journey together, I would like to offer a poem, written by Rev. Sarah Are, to put our hearts and minds in a place of reflection. In her poem, All in All, she writes:

It takes strength to dream.

I imagine it’s that same strength that leads people to say, “I love you” first,

Those three vulnerable words,

Wrapped in heart strings, whispered,

Because what could be is too good to keep quiet about.

It takes strength to choose joy.

It takes strength to push the covers off our weary bodies morning after morning,

To plant weary feet on solid ground, and look for signs of beauty.

It takes strength to remember that we are not alone,

But the story starts with bone of bone and flesh of flesh.

That feels so long ago.

Oh yes,

It takes strength to dream.

I imagine that’s why many choose not to,

For it would be far easier to simply sleep.

But there are always those who dream,

Those who are up at night picturing what could be,

Because this world is too good not to.

So we say, “I love you”

We push the covers off.

We find solid ground.

We look for beauty.

And we dream,

We dare to dream.

I believe this is a good way to begin our theme ‘Those Who Dream’ because this Advent requires more imagination than years past. You are being asked in the time of pandemic and protest, to dream of the seemingly unthinkable: of love, of joy, of hope, of peace all culminating in the glorious birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. Like the poem aptly says, it would be easy to pull the blankets over our heads, it would be easy to shield our hearts, and it would be easy to count down the days to the new year and pretend Advent and 2020 didn’t happen. I’m asking you, I’m pleading with you, this season, to dare to dream, to dare to journey with us, and to acknowledge a love, a savior, that is too good to be quiet about.

This week’s prompt comes from the Gospel of Mark, where we are told to keep awake, to keep our eyes open for the changing of the world and acknowledge that we do not know when the Lord will come and so we must be ready. It’s like packing that bag before you go to the hospital to have a baby – you do not know when, but you pack that bag in preparation. Or for those in areas where natural disasters are too often a reality, those who pack up their cupboards with items of survival to make sure they can withstand the storm. This week you, in the hope of the Christ coming, are packing your bags, preparing your hearts, and looking towards the future with hope, even when hope feels unattainable.

And you might say to me, very fairly, that this year has been hard, the sun is going down around 5 and we’re asked to stay indoors – is this not the perfect time to go to sleep? Well, I like a good nap as much as anyone, but this keeping awake doesn’t mean that you forfeit your sabbath time or you run around the house in a flurry. Actually, to keep awake, might mean just the opposite.

To keep awake means to slow down, to keep your energy where it needs to be, to keep awake and to be mindful. It isn’t about rushing from shop to shop, from making sure everything is ticked off on your to do list – this call to keep awake is to be mindful to be aware, to keep quiet for a bit and notice the world around you and to see the glimpses of the sacred at work.

II. To Keep Aware

One of my favorite parts of this passage is recognizing our humanity – we do not know when Christ will come. Yes, we know that we will celebrate on December 25th, but we do not know when Christ will come again. Wouldn’t it be great in some ways if we did? For those of us who like to prepare or be organized…which unfortunately I’m not, but I long to be…but for those who do – wouldn’t it be great to know when Christ is coming so you can be prepared? You can get all the good deeds in a row, repent of all sin, clean your house, prepare a meal, so you can welcome the Savior properly. What’s wonderful is- we’re all in the dark here, we just don’t know – and there the call comes again.

Yet we are called to keep awake, keep alert, for the hope of the nations is coming and love will once again conquer all. How will you do that this year? Will it be by using the devotional that you received, might it be through bundled-up walks through nature and turn off technology, might it be just being a bit more aware of what’s around you and where God is at work? Prepare your hearts, my friends, keep alert, and keep aware. May you stay awake to hope this week, to notice God in quiet moments of reflection and to prepare yourself for this season as we step and dare to dream of a Christ-like world. Amen.